

What Date Did First Provo Settlers Arrive?

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Utah Pioneers, 1947, p. 52: "Arriving at the chosen site late in March, 1849, the colonists at once commenced the establishment of Fort Utah."

Provo, Pioneer Mormon City, compiled by Writers Program of Parks Progress Administration, 1942, p. 45: "March had nearly passed before the colonists completed their plans for departure from Salt Lake) . . . It took three days to make the trip with teams, a few horses, and mules." (A footnote says: "The exact date of the arrival of the settlers at Provo is not known. After Gottfredson, quoting from a journal of George Washington Bean, sets the date as April 1, 1849" (which seems the most probable date.)")

Bean's Journal

The above-mentioned journal of George Washington Bean, a member of the original band of settlers, was published and copyrighted in 1945 by Flora and Anna Bean Horne under the title, "Autobiography of George Washington Bean and His Family Recollections, a Utah Pioneer of 1847."

Writing of the expedition, Mr. Bean said: "There were 30 men in our party, but no families were in the group . . . (This latter bears out some other sources including John E. Booth and Church Historical Records, that the men came first and went back for their families after getting the settlement started.)"

"On March 31 we camped 10 miles north of the river ford. My father, my brother James and I were part of the company some of us on horseback."

"On April 1st, my 18th birthday, we moved on to within about 2½ miles of Timpanogos River (Provo R.) when we were met by a young Indian Brave on horseback dashing toward us as fast as he could ride, throwing his arms and performing all sorts of wild gesticulations. When he got within about 6 rods of our head team he jumped off his horse, threw his buffalo robe across our path and warned us not to pass that designated point . . ."

'Good Intentions'

"Dimick Huntington, our interpreter, told of all our good desires and intentions and that President (Brigham) Young, the Great Mormon Chief, had sent us, and that we would like to be 'Tco - ege - tik - a - hoo' — good friends — with the natives and do them much good if allowed to settle with them."

"The little Brave dashed off to report to the tribe, and we slowly moved on. Presently a large party met us with the War Chief at their head and we all stopped and talked the matter over again. The party seemed satisfied and we moved on and were allowed to camp on the north side of the river."

"Many had sucker fish for dinner but father and I had a fat sewed crane I killed with my rifle during the day, which was one particular event of my 18th birthday . . ."

"After looking over the country a day or two we decided to locate on the south side of the river . . ."

Young School Teacher

George W. Bean, incidentally, was the young man who lost a hand in a premature blast of the Fort Utah cannon Sept. 1, 1849. William Dayton was killed in the mishap. Mr. Bean became one of Provo's first school teachers. Later he helped colonize Sevier County.

His chronicling of April 1 as the date the settlers arrived at the banks of the Provo River would seem to have good credibility since: (1) Mr. Bean was there; (2) he kept notes on early-day happenings and related in detail the arrival; (3) he obviously was alert and well-educated for his age inasmuch as he served as an early-day school teacher here; and (4) he associated the arrival at the river with his own birthday — an 18-year-old boy wouldn't likely forget a double occasion like that.

Article in Enquirer

The date is backed up by a feature article entitled, "Pioneer Days and Indians" published in The Daily Enquirer of Provo, Nov. 27, 1894, which Dr. Colton quoted as saying: "It was on the first day of April 1849 that those venturesome pioneers . . . camped on the . . . Timpanogos or Provo River . . ." The article then related a version of the young Indian Brave's halting of the colonizers as they approached the river.

Since the anonymous writer of the Enquirer piece used the pronoun "we," Dr. Colton concluded that he likely was one of the original members of the colonization party.

Commemorated as March 12, 1849; April 1 Held 'More Reliable' Date

When Did First Settlers of Provo Actually Arrive?

By N. LAVERL CHRISTENSEN
March 12, 1849, traditionally is commemorated as Provo's birthday.

But is that really the date when the first colony of Mormon settlers arrived?

The writer doesn't think so. From our examination of evidence available, we believe the settlers reached the banks of the Provo River some 20 days later.

We are not one to debunk history, nor to discredit the writings of good men and women who have gone before. But in this case, arrival dates suggested by various historians range from "early in March" to April 1, 1849. Some of these have to be wrong. Who is right?

There is an autobiography of a charter member of the original Provo group which sets forth April 1 as the date of arrival, and the statement of a second pioneer to back up the contention. Minutes in the LDS Church Historical Record show that it wasn't until March 17 that the roster for the Provo colonization was complete. It would have required some time to get ready for the three day trip.

Let's have a look at a number of the histories, keeping in mind that (1) information shedding light on the subject has been made available since some of these were written; and (2) historians with a wide range of material to cover, may not in every case have had time for exhaustive tracking down of a single elusive fact . . . Like the date this valley was settled. Irrespective of the time, it may not have seemed that important.

Most of the following sources have been checked personally by this writer. Others are quoted from a historical study of "Exploration of Utah Valley" by Ray C. Colton, 1946, written for a master's thesis at Brigham Young University. (Dr. Colton is now with the faculty of the LDS Institute at University of Utah.)

E. W. Tullidge, History of Provo, Tullidge Quarterly Magazine, July 1884, p. 233: "Early in March 1849 the first colony sent south of Great Salt Lake County set out under John S. Higbee to found Provo City."

Orson F. Whitney, History of Utah, Vol. 1, 1892, p. 399: "John S. Higbee . . . at the head of about 30 families . . . set out from Salt Lake City early in March 1849 to found a settlement on Provo River."

J. Marius Jensen, History of Provo, 1924, p. 33: "After three days' travel, they (the Mormon settlers) arrived at Provo River about March 12, 1849."

Andrew L. Neff, History of Utah, 1940, p. 151: "Three days it had taken the colonists to reach their destination with their provisions, seed, implements of husbandry, and livestock, so it was approximately March 12, 1849, when the new center began its existence."

(Note: The date March 12, 1849, is inscribed on the monument near the first site of Fort Utah east of the Geneva Road some 40 rods north of Center Street, dedicated by the Daughters of Utah Pioneers Aug. 30, 1937; also on a monument at North Park, dated July 24, 1941, by the Sons and Daughters of Utah Pioneers.)

John E. Booth, "History of Provo Fourth Ward": "It was not until the latter part of March, A. D. 1849 that any settlement for the cultivation of the soil and the making of permanent homes was attempted . . . on Provo River."

Memories That Live, a Centennial History of Utah County published by the Daughters of (See WHAT DATE, Page 7)

Pioneers made the 'Move' to Provo to avoid armies

10 May 1987

Provo's recent designation as "state capital for a day" called to mind an episode from early Utah history when our fair city was "number one" in the Utah Territory for several weeks as well as temporary headquarters of the LDS Church.

This was during the "Move" in the late stages of the so called "Utah War" of 1857-58 in which a federal military force was sent west by President James Buchanan to quell a "Mormon rebellion" that Utahns claimed was non-existent.

The exodus from the northern valleys (mainly Salt Lake and Weber) brought some 30,000 people into Utah Valley. The "wanderers" — their wagons piled high with provisions and personal belongings — found temporary homes with local people or camped at convenient spots such as the river bottoms.

Provo, a country town of 2,000 at that time, became the expanded "metropolis" of the migration. Church President Brigham Young had his office in a small adobe building on the north side of Center Street a little west of what is now University Avenue.

The "Move" followed a Mormon Council decision of March 18, 1858 to abandon resistance to the federal army. Brigham Young sent word to the settlements to prepare for the precautionary exodus, leaving only enough men to burn the houses and crops if the troops proved unalterably hostile.

I have perused several histories in writing this nutshell summary of the "Utah War." Perhaps you yourselves would enjoy "hitting the books" for further details as a refresher.

The seeds were planted for the "Utah Expedition" when two disgruntled former federally-appointed judges reported to Washington officials that Mormons were in "open rebellion" against the laws of the government.

Without thoroughly investigating these and other complaints, Buchanan sent a military force westward in 1857. There



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were about 2,400 men when Col. Albert Sidney Johnston took over the command. (Johnston later served ably as a Confederate general in the Civil War. He was fatally wounded in action.)

Buchanan appointed Alfred Cumming to replace Brigham Young as territorial governor and he was escorted west by the troops. Cumming proved a wise and skillful leader in ultimately bringing about a peaceful compromise settlement to the confrontation.

It was on July 24, 1857, tenth anniversary of the arrival of the first company of pioneers in Great Salt Lake Valley, that Mormons learned federal troops were headed for the territory.

Young called an emergency council of leading citizens and it was decided to immediately begin preparations for defense and to stall the army's entry into the Great Basin if possible.

Using guerrilla tactics, Mormons burned supply wagons, set fire to forage along the trail, and scattered or drove away hundreds of cattle. These actions, combined with the early onset of severely cold and snowy weather, forced the troops to

winter at Camp Scott, established near the burned remains of Fort Bridger, Wyo.

Winter months provided time to clear away misunderstandings between the pioneers and the government. The Mormons' old friend, Col. Thomas L. Kane, was exceedingly helpful in private negotiations. He convinced Governor Cumming that he should come to Salt Lake City alone and determine for himself the facts in the rebellion issue.

Cumming was welcomed with official deference by Brigham Young and other Utah leaders. His report to Buchanan — who was encountering severe criticism in the East for the expedition against the people of Utah — prompted the president to appoint a commission to offer the settlers terms for peace.

On April 12, 1858, the day Cumming arrived in Salt Lake City, he was caught in the flood of the great southward migration. He attempted without success to dissuade the people from leaving their homes.

However, the governor won assurance from leaders that if the troops did not molest the people nor settle near them, they would return.

The peace commissioners arrived June 7 and negotiated an amicable compromise.

Mormons, although denying they were guilty of crimes for which the expedition had been sent against them, admitted they burned or destroyed government wagon trains and other property, for which pardon was granted. Meantime, federal jurisdiction in the territory was strengthened considerably through the episode.

Col. Johnston's troops arrived in Salt Lake Valley June 26, marching quietly through the city and on to Cedar Valley where they established Camp Floyd near the present town of Fairfield.

Now the direction of migration was reversed. Within days the "Move" participants were headed homeward — and Provo's brief reign as the territory's chief city and the church headquarters came to an end.



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